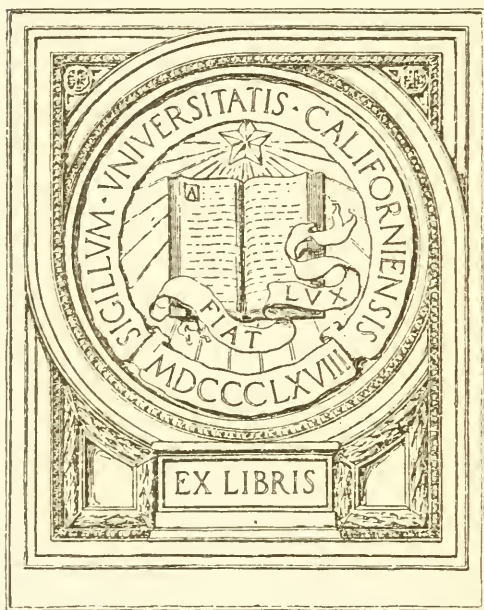


A MODERN JOB

AN ESSAY ON
THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

ÉTIENNE GIRAN

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES




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A MODERN JOB



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ÉTIENNE GIRAN.
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A MODERN JOB

AN ESSAY ON
THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

BY

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INTRODUCTION

THERE are few writings of which it can be asserted so confidently as of the Book of Job that they are not of an age but for all time. We may, indeed, have to admit that not all times have been capable of appreciating even its general intention, that, more especially, the Christian Church, of whose spiritual heritage it has been perhaps the most unique and certainly the most enigmatical portion, has consistently buried the burden of its message beneath a meaningless mass of allegorical interpretation. Yet no Christian generation has been able wholly to escape the challenge of its mystery. And now that the caprices of allegorism have departed to the limbo of dead sciences, and that modern scholarship has done something to dispel the darkness in which the more obvious meaning of the book had been so long shrouded, that challenge has become still more insistent.

There is no longer, therefore, any excuse for that false reverence which has persistently refused to read this book with open eyes. From the very heart of the ancient Hebrew Scriptures, the cry of a life

bruised by the fundamental injustice of the world-order rises in fearless accusation of the Power which directs that order. And that Power in personal presence blesses and approves his accuser, while he rebukes and rejects those who have appeared as the imperturbable apologists of his righteous rule. "Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath." That is the great enigma of the Book of Job, an enigma which plants it not merely accidentally at the heart of Hebrew Scripture, but essentially at the heart of all religion. Religion does not consist in the passive submission to fact, however pious that submission may be; but in the heroic struggle to wring from fact its ultimate secret of hope, through whatever fierceness of revolt and bitterness of despair the secret may have to be sought and won. The bruised sinew is the sign-manual of God, his sure witness that the life which has sustained that conflict with him and bears the permanent mark of its costingness is blessed. And the religion of him who prevailed with God was worthy to understand that God's fiercest accuser might be also his most beloved servant.

But though the real character of the Book of Job need be no longer hidden from us, though we are forced to recognise in it the honest revolt of unmerited suffering against the indifferent order that permits it blessed by God, and the traditional piety which would somehow explain away the fact rejected

by him, yet it remains that its message hardly finds us. The story comes to us in such an ancient dress that we have no eyes for anything but its archaic dignity and wonder. We gape in admiration of the imagery and miss the substance. We take the sternest instance of realism in literature, the realism of a soul in its conflict with its God, for the romantic caprice of some religious primitive. M. Giran is impatient of such dilettantism. He has taken the risk—and though great it was worth taking—of setting the reality of that terrible despair fighting for its legitimate hope in a framework of familiar circumstance. M. Giran's Job is a citizen of his own adopted country, Holland. If, like his distant ancestor, he is suddenly bereaved of his children, he suffers also the losses, not of an Arabian sheikh, but of a modern captain of industry. The religious atmosphere, too, has changed perforce. It is from the midst of the religious conceptions of the twentieth century that the modern Job launches his accusations against the Eternal Ruler, hardly less terrible, but certainly not more so, than those of his predecessor. Only in one particular does M. Giran amplify rather than abandon the structural lines of his model. His Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar are no mere puppets repeating, with slight varieties of accent, the same hollow word of a sacrosanct theological tradition. They have, at least, each of them his own distinct theodicy. Each urges home his own with a sincerity which is more than intellectual. Yet these theodicies

are of the intellect primarily ; and just because they are so, they will be none of them wholly persuasive.

Again, M. Giran's Elihu is not a raw youth, claiming to speak by the spirit, yet speaking, however truly and forcibly, from somewhere off that stage of concrete anguish on which the drama of the afflicted soul is played. He is, on the contrary, old in years and in the experience of the life that serves, and serves in the humblest place ; and the lore he has learned there has wrought in him the simplicities of the heart of the little child. So it is that his brief word tells, that it is germane to the drama, where the protracted argument of his ancestor is convicted of an irrelevance which betrays its imported character. But even the Elihu of the later drama is not equal to the alleviation of his master's woes. There M. Giran, with a fine insight, has followed the indications of the Biblical story, but has followed them with the chastened reserve of one who would be sincere with himself and with the anguish of troubled souls in our own doubtful day. Ruskin has written of the elder Job : "When the Deity himself has willed to end the temptation, and to accomplish in Job that for which it was sent, he does not vouchsafe to reason with him, still less does he overwhelm him with terror, or confound him by laying open before his eyes the book of his iniquities. He opens before him the arch of the dayspring, and the foundations of the deep ; and amidst the covert of the reeds, and on the

heaving waves, he bids him watch the kings of the children of pride—and the work is done.” It is not the arch of the dayspring, radiant with the triumphant glory of the Eastern sunrise, but the pathetic glory of the dying sunset across the flats of Holland, that whispers its promise of peace to the tortured soul of the modern Job. To him, too, God must speak in the silence. But the words of his friends have not been all in vain ; they have spoken out of hearts that yearned to understand. Their theodicies may have been unconvincing, but their remembered love is part of the warmth which comes from that revealing flash of the sunset.

God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our lives out.

A. L. LILLEY.

A MODERN JOB

“The man who claims that he has attained his end, has not succeeded in his quest: he has abandoned it.”

SAINT LEO THE GREAT.

(*Sermo X.: De Nativitate Domini.*)

“ . . . So Job died, being old and full of days.”

His sons and daughters gathered together the fourteen thousand sheep, the six thousand camels, the thousand yoke of oxen and the thousand she-asses that he possessed: they took their respective shares of their father's inheritance and went their way.

The eldest son remained in the north of Arabia Petræa. The daughters, who were married to Arabs of Mesopotamia, settled on the banks of the Euphrates and the Tigris. The other sons, indifferent to danger, pitched their tents on the banks of the Jordan and the Nile.

Year after year passed by, and century followed century in its course. The memory, however, of the venerable chieftain of the ancient tribe remained undimmed in the minds of the succeeding generations.

Scattered throughout the most distant lands,

converted to new teachings, Israelites in Palestine, Christians in the West, and Mussulmans in Arabia, the countless descendants of Job still remained united in one common feeling of veneration for the patriarch.

Sometimes, at dusk, when the day's work was done, the elders would gather round them their children and recall to memory the glorious past. All listened reverently to the wondrous story. First came a picture of primitive prosperity, the righteous reward of a life of rectitude and austerity; then the glorious list of unmerited misfortunes, the wonderful resignation of Job, the passionate accusations of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, who, to exonerate the Almighty, heaped unjust reproaches on the head of their unhappy friend; and finally—unexpected triumph!—the miraculous intervention of God, who put to confusion his blundering interpreters and restored Job to all his former glory.

But these touching narratives, though they filled with wonder the minds of the young, caused great numbers to look upon the reality of things as only the more cruel. Again and again had misfortune befallen them. Trusting in the justice of God, they had become resigned to their lot; his justice, however, had not been manifested. Why was this? They believed in his overruling providence with all the ardour of soul shown by their Arab fathers. They served God with like zeal and gladness. And

lo! God made no response to their call. Was their living faith built on a fable? Could they say: "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"¹ They could not resign themselves to believe this.

And so they shut themselves up in their tradition as in a fortress. Time and circumstance, however, like indefatigable rodents, were gnawing away at its foundations.

The same perplexing problem that, ages ago, had troubled the mind of the patriarch, in like tragic fashion now came up for solution at the hands of his descendants.

.
One of these latter, centuries afterwards, was destined to become acquainted with the full meaning of the suffering and misery, the loneliness and moral anguish of his great ancestor. About the end of last century he dwelt in one of the most flourishing cities of the Netherlands. His vessels ploughed the seas, he had branches in the principal industrial centres of the world, and his stores and warehouses in Amsterdam were filled with costly merchandise. His rectitude and rigid self-restraint had won for him the veneration and respect of all. His many children, active and honourable, showed forth the solid Christian virtues of their father. One might have said that his ancestor's providential prosperity had been showered both upon him and upon all around. His

¹ Isaiah xlv. 20.

home was a centre of hospitality. His purse was ever at the disposal of the poor ; he had friends amongst all classes. Passionately devoted to science and art, he gathered around him men of every opinion. All were rejoiced to see such great wealth in the hands of so just, compassionate, and generous a man.

But lo ! disaster suddenly befell him. Within a few years he lost his three sons, one after another ; the eldest was carried off by a violent epidemic, the second was killed in the South African war, and the third was shipwrecked and drowned off the coast of Holland.

As these successive misfortunes had caused him to neglect his financial interests, he one day found himself on the brink of ruin. The fraudulent bankruptcy of two friends, for whom he had generously stood surety, reduced him to dire poverty. After selling everything, he paid off his creditors, and went with his daughter to live in a small farmhouse, close to a dismantled windmill, on the banks of a quiet canal.

There he withdrew, to hide his distress from the eyes of men.

His daughter died. He shed not a tear, uttered no murmur of complaint. Day after day he sat there without a word, neither eating nor sleeping, sunk in stupor, dead to the world.

Then suddenly, as though something within him had broken and set him free from this grinding oppression, his eyes filled with tears and he wept long and silently.

An old servant had accompanied him. For three long years, shunning all encounter with the outside world, he shut himself up in gloomy solitude.

One day, however, his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, whose names, like his own, could be traced back to the legendary times of his ancestor, came to see him. He was sitting on the doorstep, a blank, meaningless stare in his eyes.

They drew nigh. When he saw them, he suddenly stood upright as though starting from a dream, and, without a word, bursting into a fit of sobbing, fell back on to his seat and buried his head in his hands.

The three friends sat silent by his side, too respectful of his grief to disturb it with vain words.

I

Job was the first to break the silence. There was a dull, far-away sound in his voice, as though it were amazed at hearing itself speak :

“Pardon these tears, friends ; I could no longer control myself. The springs of my energy seem dried up. The man you once knew is no more, he is dead. I feel a stranger to myself : incapable even of being moved by my own disordered state.

“Long did I suffer because I could not weep. Then I suffered because I could not restrain my tears. I prayed with faith and fervour, and the next moment

found relief in filling the air with blasphemy and cursing.

"I can no longer pray, and I have not the heart to blaspheme. Long ago I had strong convictions : now they are all gone. Here on this bank I played as a child ; ignorant of everything, I was yet more learned than I am now, on the threshold of old age. I have experienced the greatest joys, the most harrowing distress, and yet . . . I have learnt nothing, I have lost everything . . . everything that is human in a childlike soul.

"Whilst my daughter was by my side, I had someone for whom to live : there was still a spark of light to cheer me. Now she has gone, and the light has gone also. I have passed through hours of bitter despair, though without issuing from them victorious. I resemble this gloomy-looking canal beneath whose glaucous water mire and decay of every kind lie hidden, whilst silent boats glide over its placid surface. The days that pass over my head have no more effect upon me than the clouds upon the water beneath. Pity me not, however, for I have become numbed to pain, since every experience of mine has long been an occasion of suffering."

Job ceased speaking.

Eliphaz thereupon answered and said :

"There is no need to conceal thy tears, Job, for well do we understand their cause. Thou art still the friend we have long known : we love thee only

the more since these misfortunes have befallen thee. Knowing thy desire for solitude, we respected it. We were becoming uneasy, however, and so we came to thee. Forgive this selfishness, the outcome of our friendship for thee, and make no excuses for these tears.

“As I listen to thy words, my heart goes out to thee. What thou sayest, however, pains me greatly. The hurricane has passed over thy soul and left it desolate. Like the storm in the parable, it has carried off everything, even the foundations of that interior dwelling-place which thy fervent Christian faith laid down long ago. The foundations are crumbling, Job, for it was not built on a rock. Thy soul has no longer any refuge to which it may fly for shelter and peace. That, maybe, is what should cause us the greatest concern. Thou hast ceased to live, Job, because thou art no longer willing to believe.”

JOB

Believe? In what? In whom?

ELIPHAZ

In God, the God of thy Fathers.

JOB

Which God? My fathers served several throughout their history, and I myself have worshipped a great number, one after the other. Now I see the vanity of my childish worship. God! Which God wouldst

thou have me serve? The omnipotent God of the patriarchs, who delights in the reeking blood of slaughtered victims, and, surfeited with gore, stays the hand of Abraham? The powerful jealous God of Moses, who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him? The warrior God of ancient Israel, that bloodthirsty deity who had the five hundred priests of Baal put to the sword! The blind God of the prophets, who dispenses material goods, permits iniquity to prevail and scatters desolation in the abode of the just? Which God? The incarnate Word of the author of the Fourth Gospel, the Logos made flesh, man and God, without a single attribute of either? The incoherent, fantastic God of the Apocalypse? The wrathful God of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that demented God whose anger against guilty men is appeased only when they have crucified the best of his sons? The grim revolutionary God of James? The God of Paul, who counts vengeance and retribution amongst his qualities? The contradictory God of the Synoptic Gospels, who gives the sparrows their food and yet suffers Jesus to be crucified? The God-Father of Christ, who turns a deaf ear to the cries of his children? In which God must I believe? In all? Like the majority of believers, must I gather together these divinities, who strongly object to be near each other, make a cunning amalgam of them all, a single monstrous mass, and worship this multiple divinity,

this contradictory and incoherent God with his harlequin's coat, each patch of which has been borrowed from one of the countless Gods of the Biblical pantheon?

I would gladly believe, Eliphaz, but I have not yet lost my reason.

ELIPHAZ

How long has reason been the standard by which thou judgest everything? These Gods, whose differences thou art pleased to exaggerate, indicate successive stages in revelation, they veil a living reality: God, the only true God, the God of life and death, of justice and love, the God-Father manifested in Christ. In this God thou didst believe all the days of thy prosperity. When misfortune came, thy faith disappeared. That was because, in spite of thy apparent growth and progress, thou wert unable to rise to any loftier conception than that of a benevolent God dispensing temporal retribution, and against whom, just now, thou wert so sarcastic.

Thou hast believed in God whilst life has been pleasant for thee, serving him as long as he served thee. And thou hast loved him all the time his love for thee expressed itself in tangible fashion. Thy God was a divine power to whom thou hadst entrusted the guardianship of thy goods! He was the one who fulfilled thy fancies and dreams, the provider of all thy ambitions and joys!

Thou hast not understood the divine lesson that

may be learnt from the life of the patriarch of old. Nor dost thou see that we are but God's servants, and that, whenever he pleases, he can take away our property and give it to others. He causes men to die and be born without asking our opinion, for he knows better than we do what to give us. Are his ways difficult to follow? Yes, very difficult, but they are not our ways, and it is not for us to judge them. He carries out his own will, not ours.

Remember Job, thy ancestor, who, after losing everything—health, fortune, cattle, children,—exclaimed with all the fervour of his soul: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"¹ Ah, yes, I know, he protested against the words of my ancestor, violently rebelling against the idea that God was punishing him, that his misfortunes were the consequence of his own misdeeds, and that his sorrows were the result of his own faults and failings! That was a doctrine he could not accept; God does not suffer our earthly possessions and legitimate joys to be proportioned to our fidelity. He bestows on us the benefits it pleases him to bestow, and we must bow before his holy will. We are like the labourers in the parable who all received the same payment in spite of the fact that they were hired at different hours. Do we cry out against the injustice of this payment? As a matter of fact we receive more than our due; the man who

¹ Job i. 21.

received just the wages he deserved would be the most wretched and poverty-stricken individual imaginable. All we possess we hold through our Father's bountiful kindness. And should we complain or blaspheme when he is pleased to take away what he has temporarily entrusted to our keeping? Yet that is what thou art doing. Are thy fortune and happiness great, thy children prosperous? There is a God! Do thy fortune and happiness melt away, thy children die? There is no God!

No, Job: if the day is to come when thou wilt deny God, it must be for better reasons than these. Grief has unsettled thy mind: that is thy excuse.

Though I speak somewhat plainly, I well know that thy terrible destiny has made it almost inevitable for thee to utter these rebellious words. I pity thee with all my soul.

JOB

I understand perfectly the feelings that inspire thee, Eliphaz. Still, thy pity is the index of a self-righteous, pharisaical spirit. And thou art strangely mistaken as to the causes of my rebellion. The motives thou dost attribute to me are foreign to my nature. Such is not my idea of God, it is thine own, or rather the one we both held long ago. That is the God who is the object of thy worship and service, though he is mine no longer; for to me such a God is a monstrous enigma, whose crimes cannot be veiled behind his unfathomable mystery.

As thou hast said, it is my misfortunes that have opened my eyes! I neither boast of them, nor am I saddened by them. Of what should I boast? Of finding myself face to face with an insoluble problem? . . . Wherefore should I become saddened? Could I bring about greater desolation to my soul? Thou reproachest me for having evolved beneath the spur of pain. If ever I am to deny God, thou wouldst prefer my motives to be of a different order. What motives more poignant, more human or real, could I invoke? At first, during those interminable months that followed on the downfall of my dreams, the problem of evil presented itself before me, more imperious and disquieting than ever. I was too crushed to do anything else than sink into a state of resignation. Then a dull sense of rebellion brought blasphemies to my lips! Finally, gloomy pessimism laid hold upon my mind. I entered into a living death, fully aware of the irreparable. Knowest thou what that is, Eliphaz? No, thou believest in resurrection: never wilt thou know the meaning of the irreparable. Never wilt thou even approach the brink of the abyss into which I was plunged. Nor wilt thou understand that, having touched the depths of despair, grief has no longer any power over me.

Life is henceforth void of attraction. Though tears at times start from mine eyes, it is these only that weep; though sobs choke my utterance, it is my body that shakes with sobbing. My soul is calm in

its despair ; I have no hope, and there is nothing I dread.

But mankind, this old race of men whom the ages have not made wise, is still hopeful : perhaps men are more afraid ! They form mighty plans, and are stirred by the thought of the perils that surround them. I can see farther than they : I know that their plans are vain, and that despair lies in wait for them as for me. I know that suffering, misery, and mourning will take up their abode with all of them. Job, the patriarch, and my own experience have alike taught me that "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."¹

The story of him who was crucified on Calvary is not ancient history : it is the very essence of life. Every day, the son of man is nailed to the cross ; every day, torture, agony, and death are his lot. It is not my own sufferings that cause me to reject thy God ; it is the sufferings and tears of mankind ! Eliphaz, look at the motionless sails of that windmill, where all is so still and dead. It might be taken for a cross, a huge cross. One evening, as the lights of the distant town were beginning to appear, I sat watching that cross, the sole companion of my solitude. The ragged sails were tossing in the wind. It seemed to me as though a prolonged quiver ran through the cross ; I had a distinct vision of a multitude of suffering and groaning human beings, weeping

¹ Job v. 7.

in their despair, brutally nailed to it by an implacable will. It was nothing but a vision, I know ; still, it was a revelation to me of the real problem : If God is, why does suffering exist ?

This is no defiant challenge, Eliphaz ; it is a question that burns and tortures me.

ELIPHAZ

I was expecting this, Job. And what is thy answer to the question ? What says thy reason, that haughty, domineering reason of thine ? Nothing ? All the same, whether God exists or not, is not suffering a reality, the imperious reality with which thou art acquainted ? Does not its power over our bodies continue in spite of everything, destroying health, embittering the nature, sowing strife and discord, breaking hearts and spreading despair and death upon all around ? (If God does not exist, man pitifully drags along his days, like a convict's chain, in a dreadful labyrinth, whose sole issue is the bottomless pit, whose horizon is a vague emptiness, and the only deliverance from which is suicide. See where thy reason has led thee : to the utter bankruptcy of effort !

Where thy mind, however, comes to a standstill, my soul finds a guide. Where to thee all is darkness, to me all is light. Where reason founders, faith rises triumphant.

The grave is not the end of anything. In spite

of modern theories, nothing can be destroyed . . . or created . . . everything undergoes transformation. Death denotes but the end of a stage ; life cannot die. After death there begins a new existence.) . . .

JOB

Were that true, Eliphaz, I could imagine nothing more terrible ! Not for a moment because I fear or believe in the torments of hell, but because such a fate would mean condemnation to life . . . life unending. I can conceive of no more horrible nightmare.

ELIPHAZ

No, Job, this assuredly is no nightmare : it is a beneficent, a providential reality. (Not in this world does God reward the just ; the blessings he has in store for them are of a less fleeting nature. It is in that house of which the apostle speaks, "the house not made with hands,"¹ that he offers to receive them. There all evil shall be done away with, and "they that sow in tears shall reap in joy"!²

JOB

This is an imaginary world thou art peopling with thy dreams ; but even were it a real one, thy doctrine would prove anything but alluring to me. Never have I done aught from dread of punishment or hope of reward. Whatever good I have done in life

¹ 2 Cor. v. 1.

² Psalm cxxvi. 5.

has been done because it was good. The hope of a supraterritorial recompense would not prevent me from seeing injustice in this world.

The prospect of ideal beatitude that gratifies Christians may rouse the man who wants his soul to make a dividend-earning investment in some heavenly concern, so to speak: such risky dealings in the business of morality are contrary to my nature. The morbid craving after eternal delights forms the unseemly reverse of the medal, the obverse of which is typified by thine own spirit of renunciation and self-sacrifice.

This is the materialism of the spiritually minded. Nor would it excuse the omnipotent God who decreed human suffering: rather does it form the charge I bring against him! What else are the compensations of his heaven than the confession of his earthly misdeeds? What are his celestial rewards but the ransom of his cruelty in this world?

ELIPHAZ

How thou must have suffered, Job, to speak in this fashion! In the plenitude of his will, the exercise of his omnipotence, God willed that suffering should be. He willed it because man rebelled against him, as thou art doing this very moment.

I suppose that to thee Adam, the first man, is a legendary character. Wilt thou likewise deny that he is a mighty symbol? A rebellious son, he brought

sin into the world, and stirred up the wrath of God. Thou knowest the inevitable law of heredity, and art subject to it as we all are : "The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge."¹ Suffering? That is the fruit of man's sin and blindness! Accuse not God, who is good and has not willed that man should suffer without hope. His spirit came down to earth, and became flesh in the body of a child of the people. And it is this being, divine in essence, who has made human misery his own. By his sorrow, his sacrifice and martyrdom, he appeases the anger of the Father. The blood of the pure, spotless lamb is the pledge of redemption, washing out the guilt of the world. The second Adam has reconciled man and God; he has vanquished pain and death! . . .

JOB

Eliphaz, Eliphaz, such teaching is even more revolting than thy ancestor's! Who is this God of thine that his wrath is so terrible and implacable? Who is this capricious being, this cruel and angry Moloch? No longer does he find satisfaction in sacrifices of he-goats and bulls: he must even have a righteous man, his own son, offered up to him! And can this demented God, who showed no forgiveness to sinful men because they rebelled against him, forgive them for being imbrued in a fresh

¹ Jer. xxxi. 29.

crime? Mankind was lost, and yet the blood of this new victim redeems the race!

This is all pious nonsense, Eliphaz. I know how great is thy faith, and am vexed with myself for speaking in this fashion; but really, thou art no more than sounding brass, a tinkling cymbal! Thy lips but repeat the words they have been taught; to ponder them does not enter thy mind, and thou wilt never see how meaningless they are. Thou wilt never see that thy God is but a substitute for the bloodthirsty fetishes of paganism, and that by this senseless prattle—mere echoes of past superstitions—thou art converting him into some incongruous kind of being, a third-rate divinity. Nor dost thou see that, by this odious theory of redemption, thou art crushing and degrading all sense of responsibility in the heart of man. No man sane in body and mind would permit another to perish in his stead. For myself, I will have none of this salvation obtained from an avenging God by the blood of an innocent victim. I prefer his wrath!

But let this wrath of his fall upon those who deserve it, otherwise it is but madness! Let it cease to fall upon such as have either committed no crime or are unconscious of having done so! Let it cease to weigh heavily upon those innocent creatures whose childish laughter brings a little hope and light into the sorrowful abodes of men! Let his anger be that of a being in whom there is still left a sense of justice,

or at all events let him manifest his omnipotence and remove from us the power to judge him !

ELIPHAZ

Thy misfortunes and troubles have not crushed thy pride !

Nor hast thou reflected that God may have willed suffering for the very purpose of bringing us to confusion ; that he may have taken away thy children and thy wealth in order to abase thy proud reason and make thee more fully aware of thy weakness and powerlessness. Hast thou not pondered over these questions ?

JOB

No, Eliphaz, for I am not thinking of myself. Often have I wondered why Christ suffered so cruelly, why the anguish of his suffering in Gethsemane met with no answer. Was it to crush his pride that God caused him to suffer ?

ELIPHAZ

It was to crush thine own, Job, for in vain dost thou speak of Christ and of mankind ; it is thine own broken heart that is in rebellion against God. But thou hast not heard his tragic warnings ; thou dost neither understand the depths of his thought, nor see his love in the misfortunes he has inflicted upon thee. Thou art not aware that he loves thee and wishes to draw thee near to himself ! In the days of

thy prosperity, his praise was on thy lips : he wished to see how far thy trust in him would go. His object was to try thy heart, to lay bare thy soul ; and so he meted out these awful trials which have crushed thee to the ground. Didst not thou, who knowest his love, understand that it was in love he tested thee ? Why didst thou not regard these trials as an occasion of great joy, and not of affliction ? “ There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man : but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.”¹ Does thy pitiful destiny appear to surpass the bounds of justifiable suffering ? The explanation is that God considered thee strong enough to come forth victorious ! Thy very pride should have found in thy trials sufficient sustenance to keep thee steadfast in the faith. Thy faith, however, was like yonder clouds thine eyes are fixed upon, wafted along by an invisible breeze. Let a strong wind arise, straightway they disappear. The tempest has blasted thy soul and thy spark of faith has been extinguished. Abraham, the patriarch of old, the rude uncouth Bedouin, was wiser than thou in his ruthless determination. The voice of his God was heard commanding him to give up his son as a burnt offering. Without a single murmur or sigh, with his strongest affections and dearest hopes dashed to the ground, Abraham prepared the altar.

¹ 1 Cor. x. 13.

JOB

And is such a God the object of thy worship? Dost thou call him a God of love? Wert thou to tempt thine own child in like fashion, Eliphaz, thou wouldst be the cruelest father alive. But what wouldst thou be, if, having power to read his soul, thou shouldst prefer to torture it? That is what thy God does. He is spirit and reads the hearts of his creatures as an open book; even before our lips have uttered the faintest desire or prayer, our soul lies bare before him. Dost thou not think, Eliphaz, that he might dispense with inflicting so cruel an experience, which, being no longer serviceable, is altogether monstrous?

ELIPHAZ

But it is not for himself that God puts men to the test! He never inflicts on us experiences that are ineffectual. It is not he who is lacking in knowledge, for he knows all things. It is ourselves whom these trials are intended to instruct. God sends them to us so that our rebellious hearts may have an opportunity to repent, that our pride may be reproved, our folly cured, our idle conscience aroused, our will and energy lashed into action. Tears and sorrow, poverty and mourning, are our great teachers throughout life. It is God's will that they should help forward our true growth.

JOB

Eliphaz, thy excess of faith has turned thy head. Though there are men of valiant will, who regard pain as a mighty teacher, make no mistake—it is man who must be glorified, not God. Pain is depressing and evil ; if God willed its existence, he willed an evil thing. Now, evil remains evil, whatever be the end in view. The end pursued by this God of thine does not justify the means he uses. One does not destroy men's happiness, ruin their homes, break their hearts, take away all hope . . . slay them for the purpose of teaching them to live !

ELIPHAZ

True, Job ; but then, this God who slays them is the master of life ; he has at his disposal the whole of eternity in which to enable them to forget the sorrows of a day !

IOB

An eternity of joy may cause an hour's suffering to be forgotten ; the one who willed that hour's suffering is none the less guilty of having willed it.

The motives thou attributest to God are, in my eyes, but extenuating circumstances. Though pleading guilty, Eliphaz, thou art yet condemning thy God in thy desire to find excuses for him. Do not protest. I judge by facts, not suppositions, and thou shalt not wrest from me a verdict of indulgence or

kindness. I cannot be bribed by any hypothetical compensations of the hereafter.

I cannot acquit thy God. Nor, on the other hand, would he wish me to forgive him.

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A profound silence followed. Eliphaz made no reply ; he sank on to his knees in prayer.

II

Thereupon Bildad continued the conversation and said :
“ Job, thou wouldst not thus violently accuse God, hadst thou ceased to believe in him.”

JOB

That may be so, Bildad ; still, I do not love him. “ The heavens,” writes the Psalmist, “ declare the glory of God.” All the same, the earth proclaims the extent of his cruelty. Look around. Nature is calm and peaceful all about us to-night in this quiet corner of the globe. And yet how deceptive it all is ! Suffering is everywhere. The very blades of grass beneath thy feet are scenes of pain, the infinitely small insects we crush under foot are in throes of agony ; in that slimy water, terrible dramas take place ; away behind the veil of mist that hides from view the houses of the great city from which you have come, there is unspeakable

distress : weeping children, wailing mothers, despairing old men, poor suffering creatures expiring on beds of sickness. On distant shores, in other towns, in lonely cottages, we have the same spectacle : sighs and prayers and lamentations. This very moment, thousands of human beings are holding up their hands to God, beseeching him to answer their prayers. And God remains dumb. Is he love ? Then how can he for a single moment endure the maddening sight of all this distress ? Is he all-powerful ? What is he doing with his omnipotence ?

BILDAD

The spectacle that stirs thee, Job, is not a matter of indifference to me. It causes me, also, no slight degree of suffering. But I know nothing of this God against whom thou bringest such vehement charges. As I listened to thee, I wondered if thou wert not attacking some phantom, or if, like another Don Quixote, thou wert not engaged in battle with a windmill.

JOB

But this is the God whom believers worship, Bildad ! Dost thou no longer believe in God ?

BILDAD

Of course I believe in God. With all my soul I believe in the incomparable intuitions of the prophets and the divine message of Christ. But I

know not this God who fills thee with anger. My God does not will evil.

JOB

Does he intervene in human affairs?

BILDAD

Unceasingly.

JOB

Then, Bildad, he is either a criminal himself or an accomplice in the crime. The dilemma is one from which there is no escape. If his slightest word or gesture or breath could abolish suffering, why does he not do so?

Listen to me, Bildad; this is the old dilemma once more. Either God *could and will not*, or *he would and cannot*. In the former case, he is responsible; in the latter, powerless.

BILDAD

Thou art right, Job; it is a dilemma, and a terrible one for a believing soul. Long ago did it enter my mind; it has tormented me for many a year past. I believed most fervently in the God of tradition, that God whom metaphysics offers us with his attributes of omnipotence and omniscience. The spectacle of this blood-stained world threw me into the same crisis of despair as that from which thou art now suffering. And I sought, sought for long years, in meditation and prayer, in dread and tears, with all

the fervour of my soul. This omnipotent God who, in a moment of time, *could* overcome evil, but *would not* do so, roused in me a spirit of invincible rebellion; I lost confidence in him, and dreaded him. His presence, which, despite my anxiety, I felt to be as living as ever, made me shudder. At last I ceased to pray.

Only at the foot of the cross did my prayer-starved heart find peace. In contact with Christ, I regained serenity of soul, acquiring the certainty that God does not will evil, and that human suffering is not his doing.

JOB

Then, Bildad . . .

BILDAD

Then I understood that this omnipotence which ancient philosophies ascribed to him was but a metaphysical attribute, and had no counterpart in the world of sense and observation. I have lost an all-powerful God, but have found once more the Father of whom Jesus speaks, the God who is love. This proved to be my deliverance, and my past anguish gave way to fervent thanksgiving.

My God was not blind or deaf, cruel or wilfully stern.

Nor was he a God who, either veiling his omnipotence or awaiting the hour to manifest it, tolerates, yea, tolerates the worst of tyrannies, the most dreadful crimes, the most atrocious butchery. He was no longer

that barbarous, all-powerful being who, knowing and seeing all, wilfully shuts his eyes upon the abominations of earth and dissembles his indifference or complicity beneath inexplicable and mysterious designs. I have followed the poet's advice :

Fais-nous ton Dieu plus grand si tu veux qu'on l'adore !"¹

I have made my God greater, I have made him a moral God. Most ardently would he free mankind from suffering ; he is ever working with this end in view, but he has not won the victory. He has not yet attained to omnipotence in this world. . . .

ELIPHAZ

I am amazed at what thou sayest, Bildad. How desperate is the decision at which thou hast arrived ! It is almost the suicide of God. I should be less moved wert thou to proclaim the existence of a God whose unfathomable will had delivered man up to himself. Is this a theory of which thou art ignorant ? It is one I wholly reject, for its partisans deny the miraculous and momentary intervention of God in the normal course of events. It safeguards his omnipotence, however. It was by virtue of his almightiness that God entrusted the earth to men. Willingly and freely did he arm them for its conquest ; willingly and freely, after setting bounds to their sphere of action, did he remain in the background ; willingly and freely has

¹ "Make thy God greater if thou wouldst have us worship him !" —
LAMARTINE.

he liberated man, and now he respects this freedom of his.

BILDAD

Then it was willingly and freely that he made himself powerless, Eliphaz? Whether his powerlessness is deliberate or imposed, the results are the same.

JOB

In thine eyes, this powerlessness has been imposed upon him. Consequently his will comes into conflict with a stronger power. Who is this God of evil?

BILDAD

Give him any name thou pleasest. People call him Satan. He is the demon of evil. The orthodox of every sect of professing Christians imagine they believe in Satan. They have no right to do so! A single word uttered by their all-powerful God should suffice to crush him for ever; otherwise it is a crime to tolerate him.

If they want to remain faithful to the old doctrine of God and Satan, they must agree that God is powerless. For my part, the conviction I hold is one that cannot be shaken. It is built up of the most intimate experiences, day by day and hour by hour. "God does not will that I should suffer," my soul exclaims. On the other hand, I cannot believe that he is indifferent to my suffering: that would be too cruel. He would then wholly cease to be God.

Consequently I am compelled to affirm the existence of an evil power opposing his designs and momentarily and partially triumphing over him. Mankind, the battle-ground of the strife between the two, offers the spectacle of a thrilling drama.

JOB

That is Zoroastrianism, Bildad. Ormuzd and Ahriman have risen again from their ashes.

Thy God, however, is not so strong as Ormuzd : he is but an inferior demiurgus, and will be slain by Satan. Thy vanquished God will never prove the victor.

Thou must be in more desperate plight than myself !

BILDAD

No, I am not in despair ; I am burning with the ambition and desire to compass the triumph of my God. Henceforth I regard the task set before conscious humanity as a divine work. God is by my side, struggling with me, weeping with those who weep, and suffering with those who suffer, marching alongside those who have valiantly determined to win perfect freedom. He is the conscious effort towards good, the active will working within us, intelligence, goodness, and love pregnant with life, but he has not yet overcome the forces of death. His repulses and failures vex him sorely.

But if the cross manifests God's powerlessness, it

also shows his unfathomable love. "Unable to overcome," to quote from a contemporary, "love gives itself, it calls and waits, hopes and suffers . . . triumphing in defeat. Christ came to save God! This suffering, vanquished God is the one who speaks to my heart. God consoles us for that which grieves him also. Then, before inexplicable sorrow or impiety, our faith might express itself, in sublime converse with the Father, somewhat after this fashion :—Fear nothing ! I do not suspect thee, for I know thou art not concerned in all this. Did I believe such to be the case, I should be in despair ! To pray to God, all the same, in presence of the inevitable, and when all is dark around, is an admirable act of homage to the thought of love and affection which, deep in the heart of things, is struggling against dark fatality ; it is refusing to regard God as the father of evil, it is allying one's own to the divine powerlessness, it is saying to the Father : If we are overcome, we will be overcome together. Nothing is lost ; I am still thy child !"¹

JOB

And thinkest thou this will console thy God ? Bildad, the faith that animates thee is most admirable ; I perceive that thou hast the soul of a seer. Perhaps thou art a prophet ! This painful conflict, however, which stirs thy soul so deeply avails nothing against my implacable reason. Misery remains the same ; an

¹ Wilfred Monod, *Aux croyants et aux athées*.

impotent God will not change it. I would rather have Ormuzd.

And there are many who would prefer to bow to the mysterious will of an all-powerful God whose unexplained caprices leave them, at all events, a chance of running away.

BILDAD

But God will overcome, Job, if we help him ; he will overcome if every man, fully conscious of his obligations, would fling, "like Brennus of old, his sword into the balance."¹

With all my soul do I believe in his ultimate victory. What believer, seeing his God suffer, would not wish to assuage his pain ? God calls upon us to come to him !

I hear his summons in the misery of mankind ; I hear his entreaties louder than all others. I hear his prayer, Job ; for it is to us that God is praying—it is we who must answer it.

JOB

These are touching conceptions, though they are nothing more. The real state of things is quite different. As I have not thy imagination, I do not hear God praying. But I do hear the wail of human beings, and thy God will have to call more loudly if his voice is to drown this mournful plaint.

¹ Wilfred Monod, *Aux croyants et aux athées*.

Wouldst thou have my opinion, my frank opinion? Though thou hast saved thy God from a most detestable complicity, thou hast not saved him from ridicule. Pardon me, Bildad, if I vex thee—for well do I know the ardour of thy soul—but, as I was listening to thee, my wandering gaze fell upon yonder inartistic advertisement which thou canst see from this spot—a loud-toned daub contrasting unpleasantly with the beautiful, sober-looking verdure on the towing-path. Look at those words in large print: **WILL NOT SHRINK**. The picture is quite simple. On a stretched rope is hanging a line of clothes bravely tossing about in the wind. They have successfully passed the air and water test, without shrinking, and now proclaim the name and fame of the manufacturer. Two washerwomen, arms akimbo, assume an attitude of proud defiance. And there, behind the mountains in the distance, may be seen a shapeless being, with swollen, flaming face, congested features and angry eyes, as he waves his arms in despair, before finally disappearing: this is the sun, that would gladly make the texture shrink, but cannot do so . . . consequently he is tearing his hair in a fit of passion.

Bildad, I know this is only fancy and imagination; I know my brutal irony proves nothing: still, I shall never be able to look at that vanquished and powerless sun without thinking of this God of thine.

Nor do I share thy illusions. Dost thou flatter thyself that thou hast released him of all responsibility

by taking away his omnipotence? On the contrary, thou hast but made him the more guilty. What! he knew himself powerless, and yet he willed that the world should be? He knew he would be vanquished again and again, and yet became involved in such an enterprise?

One of two things must be true: either he was aware of his powerlessness, or else he was ignorant of it. In the latter case, he is an unconscious being; in the former, he is the most culpable blunderer imaginable: a family council would have to be held for the purpose of determining his responsibility!

An all-powerful God had the right to create the world; for he could destroy or transform it with a breath. A powerless God like thine had no such right. This relative powerlessness in the world of sense is the very thing that condemns him.

It is as though he said to us: "I did not know! I had not foreseen it! I thought I should prove the victor! Be confident and patient: I shall gain the victory . . . some day!"

Such fickleness and lack of foresight are unworthy of a God. No one ever starts an enterprise in so heedless a fashion! And thou wilt not have me condemn him? Thou wilt not have me regard him as even more guilty than an omnipotent God? An omnipotent God may have mysterious designs which, in his sight, justify cruelty that we regard as inexcusable. But thy God has not even this excuse.

He is reduced to the plight of saying : "I did not expect it would turn out so ! I have not done it purposely ! My intentions were honourable ! I love you all the same ! And I share in your sufferings !"

He suffers, sayest thou ? He must suffer terribly, Bildad. He suffers not only through our sufferings, but also through his own. And the latter are not the less easy to bear ! What pangs of regret and remorse must be his !

Try to imagine a loving father who, after bringing his innocent children to some vile spot, sees them tortured, degraded, and defiled, without the possibility of defending them ! And this every day, year after year, century after century !

What an awful nightmare ! And it is in such a nightmare that thy God lives. How terrifying ! He must bear hell in his very soul. Instead of condemning him, I now pity him ! I pity him with all my heart. How wretched he must be !

Thou, too, Bildad, like thy Christ-Brennus, willed to save God ! Thou hast flung thy sword into the balance !

But it has fallen into the wrong one !

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Bildad felt an ardent flow of words, burning for utterance, rising within him. He said nothing, however, finding excuse for his friend, in whom pain had inspired such cruel thoughts.

III

In his turn Zophar now spoke :

"Thy words are very bitter, Job ; perhaps even somewhat unjust.

"In such matters, all categorical affirmations are certain to be wrong. It is human ideas, not eternal truths, that come into collision in this war of words. This it is fitting that we should take into consideration.

"Our beliefs are not infallible dogmas : there is no infallible dogma. Our beliefs are the expression of our feeble murmurings when brought face to face with supreme reality. This alone should make us cautious.

"Listening to you, one would imagine the whole question depended on the miraculous intervention of God in human affairs. Thou, Eliphaz, art trying to justify his apparent withdrawal by invoking his mysterious designs. Thou, Bildad, thinkest to find excuse for him by affirming his powerlessness. And thou, Job, heapest reproaches upon him for intervening unjustly.

"Are you certain he ever intervenes at all in human affairs ? For my part, I am convinced there is no such thing as a miracle."

ELIPHAZ

All the miracles in history, Zophar, belie thy words !

ZOPHAR

No, Eliphaz ; miracles will come within the domain of history only when they are historically proved true. For the present, I regard them as a product of the simple credulity of believers, who, imperfectly discriminating the causes of an event, attribute it to their God. The marvellous is not a miracle, nor is the unexplained, nor even what goes under the name of the morally supernatural. A miracle is the direct, spontaneous, ever-recurring intervention of God in the normal course of things, in violation of the laws of nature. Either a miracle is a myth, or . . . everything is a miracle.

ELIPHAZ

Such a theory is the negation of all the facts on which Christianity is based.

ZOPHAR

It is no negation ; it is an act of faith. Yes, Eliphaz, an act of faith in the permanent action of God. The facts of Christianity? Dost thou mean thereby the miraculous birth, the resurrection and ascension . . .? I have not built up my Christianity on so slight a foundation. It is based on a living reality and on moral facts too solid to be overthrown.

JOB

But if God never intervenes, the problem is even more terrible. In that case, we are dealing not with

relative but with absolute powerlessness, or else with an irreducible abstention from all action. The dilemma remains unchanged: either God is never able and is utterly powerless, or else he is never willing and his hardness of heart is most revolting.

ZOPHAR

The dilemma is incomplete and too vague; the problem must be stated more precisely. If, by God's powerlessness, thou meanest that there are things impossible for him, then it is useless to discuss the matter.

That is only too evident. It is not possible for God to cause good to be evil, to bring it about that the past should never have been, that the words I utter should never have been uttered; it is not possible for him to deny himself . . . to lie . . . or to be impure. . . .

Is God powerless? It would be sheer mockery to suggest it. If thou meanest, by omnipotence, the power to do everything, everything, even what one does not will to do, by the very definition thou art denying omnipotence. Omnipotence is the power to do everything one wills to do.

To declare even the relative powerlessness of God, we should first have to become acquainted with his will, then follow it throughout its manifestations, and finally ascertain a case of failure. That is in no one's power. Do we even know what his will is?

The churches are ready with an infinite number of replies. I, however, am not in God's confidence, so I do not know his will.

But I do know that it cannot be bent to suit our pleasure, that it is not the benevolent worker of our desires, the supplier of our whims. I do know that God does not revoke his decisions, or alter what he has once willed. I know this because I cannot conceive of him as other than immutable in his will. Either he is not God, or his will is eternal, incapable of encountering the slightest check, halt or interruption.

His will is without fluctuation, beginning or end. What he wills to-day, always has been and always will be his will.

And in the exercise of this perfect will I cannot conceive of him as other than all-powerful. I have no grounds for believing him to be powerless ; I have many for proclaiming his omnipotence.

BILDAD

Yes, but then this perfect will curbs and restrains his omnipotence ; the reason why he does not interfere in human affairs is either because he is unwilling or is unable to will. This impales us on the horns of a metaphysical dilemma.

ZOPHAR

Not at all, Bildad. We are simply caught in the toils of anthropomorphism and cannot free ourselves.

We invest God with attributes that appear to be the guarantee of a living personality, and yet we do not see that these same attributes would, in his sight, be the very negation of his being. We imagine that God is free, that at any moment of time he can will something new, or, by special determination, intervene in the normal course of things. To my mind, this is a most dangerous form of anthropomorphism.

Most certainly we regard freedom (or, at all events, what goes under the name of moral freedom) as indispensable. It is the corollary of our individual or social responsibility. But why is it so dear to us? Because we are imperfect beings, because we are personally under the obligation of deciding for some particular alternative, because our will expresses itself by repeated decisions and these decisions are relative in their nature. It is not so with God. His will is eternal because it is perfect. It is not for us to find out whether he *wills* not to will or *cannot* will what we will. Immutable in his being and in his will alike, he is, and he contents himself with being. If, at any moment of time, he were to adopt some new decision, he would cease to be identical with himself, and, modifying his eternal will, would cease to be God.

ELIPHAZ

What dost thou mean by God?

ZOPHAR

Do not expect a definition from me, or even an attempt at one. The words I use to make comprehensible his absolute immutability appear to me lamentably mean and paltry. He is ! I know no other mode of expressing God. I can find no other formula than that of the poet :

*Il est, il est, il est ; il est éperdument ;
Il est, il est, il est sans fin, sans origine,
Sans éclipse, sans nuit, sans repos, sans sommeil.*¹

I believe in him, not because some particular authority commands me to do so, or some final revelation makes him manifest, but because above my own seeking spirit I feel a spirit seeking for me ; because above my own hesitating will I feel another inflexible will ; because within myself I feel a presence that is not myself ; and I affirm this presence, I affirm the reality of this will and spirit : I call it *God*. Once I have made this discovery, once I have apprehended the divine at its origin, I see it everywhere ! It is a continual source of wonderment, an hourly ecstasy !

When my thought tries to conceive of God, intuitively it calls up the loftiest conceptions it can form, and a string of disconnected words falls from my lips : light, beauty, harmony, purity, truth, divinity, life. . . . And in my desire still more to spiritualise these words, so restricted by the realities of daily existence, I prolong

¹ Victor Hugo.

them to an infinite, inconceivable absolute. When I wish to express the reality of his being, I borrow from our poor, limited vocabulary the most ethereal words I can find: spirit, living soul, will eternally exercised in one and the same act of willing! I conceive of him as so intensely living that his being is liberated from all the manifestations to which our existence is bound down: he is, without any of the modes of being; he lives, without appearing to live. He is so indefatigably active that he seems not to be acting at all! He wills with so immutable a will that he seems not to will. . . .

ELIPHAZ

But this is Buddhism!

ZOPHAR

No, Eliphaz; but even if it were Buddhism, I would not deny the charge. All religions are daughters of the soul, so it is not surprising that they have similar aspects. This living soul, this spirit, this ever tense will, dwells not in some inconceivable deep. Nor is my God localised at some particular spot in the world: he is present throughout the universe, permeating the tiniest of infusoria and reaching to the most distant of invisible stars. He is everywhere, in everything. . . .

ELIPHAZ

Pantheism, this time.

ZOPHAR

Eliphaz, there are beams of light that radiate from the summit of every philosophy. My desire for clearness of vision is so great that I disdain none. I do not deny certain affinities of my own thought with the thought of a Spinoza, but his God is not mine. My God is a living Being: he is Being, and he is the living One.

ELIPHAZ

All the same, we must choose between immanency and transcendency. Does he rule over the world, or does he form an integral part of it?

ZOPHAR

What is the world? How is it possible to get away from it? What is meant by ruling over the universe? Would such a being be outside the universe? I do not understand. These are problems I never try to solve. I comprehend neither a limited world nor what might be called the discontinuous. Ordinary language is very deceptive. When we see two bodies that do not touch each other, we say: "These two bodies are separate." Are they? Is there nothing between them? After making a void with the air-pump, the sides of the glass bell would appear to contain only a vacuum. Is this vacuum real? No; everything is linked to everything else.

All things form part of one and the same infinite universe: there is no such thing as a vacuum, because

there is no such thing as the discontinuous. Nor can I understand why the problem of immanency and transcendency should arise regarding God. It exists only in this world of relativity and in connection with our apparently limited organisms. God is both immanent and transcendent. I feel him living and active within myself, consequently I affirm his immanency. I catch faint glimpses of him in the infinite universe, and therefore I affirm his transcendency.

What is he? I know not, nor can I form any conception of him except by means of contrasts. Am I limited? He is infinite. Am I of a hesitating and changing nature? He is inflexible and immutable. Am I imperfect? He is perfection. Do I vegetate? He lives. Was I born a few short years ago? He is without beginning or origin. Do I pass away? He is eternal. Am I in a state of becoming? He *is*.

Immanent and transcendent? These are futile, meaningless words: God is living.

JOB

Well, Zophar, I am glad he is living, for his serene unchangeableness is worse than a tomb, and he might well be regarded as dead! He is living, thou sayest?

And yet he does not intervene? Then he is even more guilty than if his power were limited by something apart from his own will. A perfect God does not create a monstrous world, abounding with suffer-

ing and crime ! Whether he intervenes or not, he created the world ; and if he is not responsible now, he was in the past.

ZOPHAR

Did I say that God created the world ?

JOB

No ; but did he not create it ?

ZOPHAR

I know nothing of that, Job ; I was not there, and am quite ignorant as to how things happened.

JOB

True ; still, thou must have worked out for thyself some satisfactory explanation of their origin.

ZOPHAR

I see no necessity whatsoever for attributing an origin to the world. Canst thou conceive of a beginning ? I cannot. I see no reason why substance should not have been from all eternity.

It will not astonish thee if I say that I am firmly convinced that God did not create the world in the traditional sense of the word : create ! I must confess that, to my mind, the title of creator would add nothing to his glory. To tell the truth, I could not conceive of an eternal will which at any moment were to make a fresh resolve. I cannot conceive of

God departing from his immutable will in order to create something. His will being perfect, were he to cease to will what he willed long ago, if only to increase his being by a new resolve, he would be a denial of himself, nor would he any longer be God.

BILDAD

Knowest thou the nature of this God of thine, immutable in his eternal will? He is a silent Sphinx whose stony eyes seem to be looking out upon the world, whereas they see nothing at all. His awe-inspiring mystery does not conceal his distressing impassiveness. Thy God-Spirit veils a God of stone. He is heartless, incapable of love. Rigid and congealed, as it were, in his own perfection, he is a God in exile. There is nothing in him of the God of the Gospels, nothing of God the Father, whose love is unfathomable; whose pardon, infinite.

ZOPHAR

Nevertheless, it is before this serene unchangeableness that men have uttered words of unfathomable love and infinite pardon. When from the lips of the prophet of Galilee there fell that soul-stirring word: "Father," they uttered the key to the enigma.

Father! The word is nothing but an image, an impression, a cry of recognition upwelling in the heart of man . . . and yet it is the most admirable of realities!

If thy all-powerful God intervenes, Eliphaz, and

permits evil to continue on earth, whatever be the reasons he invokes, he is not a Father. If, Bildad, thy God, conscious of his powerlessness, all the same willed the world into being, however deep his regret, however stupendous his effort, there is no excuse for his deed, his lack of foresight is utterly criminal : thy God is not a Father !

There is no reality in the Fatherhood of God except in so far as his will is uniform, immutable, and perfect, and his action incessant, universal, and permanent. It has no reality except in so far as his affectionate aid is granted, unceasingly and without preference, to all his children, to this immense family of mankind, to these worlds that move through space and to the innumerable beings they contain.

This was well understood by the evangelist, who ascribed to Jesus the admirable saying : "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."¹

This lofty impartiality is the characteristic of divine love. Neither favour nor wrath nor vengeance. Ever the same, God lives in the soul of all, alike of those who know him and of those who know him not. He allows himself to be found even by those who do not seek him. If only their will is in harmony with his, he sustains and strengthens, leads and enlightens them. However dark the surrounding gloom, whatever misfortunes assail us, however great the injustice that

¹ Matt. v. 45.

befalls us, he is continually at hand. And there is nothing, absolutely nothing, neither distress nor sickness, neither suffering nor death, that can separate us from him. The most divine thoughts we can conceive—goodness and purity, justice and love,—words of the utmost sublimity, ideal visions of the soul, glorious dreams of the spirit, pure, beneficent realities of our loftiest consciousness: he is all this; it is this that constitutes his presence. It is because we are always conscious of his presence that we affirm his unfathomable love; because our shortcomings do not weary him, that we believe in his infinite pardon; because every day, in times of anguish and distress, we feel him nearer to ourselves, more closely united to our own lives, that we believe in his providence.

Whilst, however, this presence brings into the hearts of many the germ of serene and soothing certainties, it animates others with a vague sense of emulation, attracting them mightily to the luminous peaks of beauty and life.

Whether conscious of it or not, this indefatigable, never-ceasing attraction constitutes his appeal to us. And everything that is true, beautiful and good, revealed by the intuition of poets and mystics, by the thoughts of scientists and philosophers, forms his permanent, his limitless revelation, filling the ages with trails of glorious light and planting on Calvary's summit a marvellous torch that will illumine the souls of men for all time.

JOB

A truce to such lyrical raving, Zophar ! Thy newly fledged enthusiasm veils not from our sight the reality of things, nor does it solve the distressing problem before us.

ZOPHAR

True ; nevertheless, it does away with certain objections ! I am not unaware of the seriousness of the question we are considering. These apparent digressions will make it all the easier to answer. If we are to avoid inextricable misunderstandings, you must make your own these ideas to which I have been giving expression, and take on trust what I say regarding the progressive formation of the world.

BILDAD

Certainly, Zophar ; all the same, there is one point which requires to be explained. What part does God play in this formation ?

ZOPHAR

God is, and he contents himself with being. . . .

His existence is such that it fills the infinitude of space. Now, whence comes this infinitude, in which God dwells ? I know not ; but to it I attribute no origin, for I cannot conceive of a beginning. I believe it is eternal, uncreated, like God himself. What is the substance of which it is composed ? Of this, too,

I am ignorant ; but it is of some kind of substance—whether imponderable or invisible, ethereal or gaseous, chaotic or uniform, matters little. This substance exists. What relation does it bear to God ? Are they the two, co-eternal aspects of one and the same reality ? Is matter, spirit asleep ? Is it an age-long scrap-heap or residuum of that impalpable substance which has filled the infinite from all eternity ? These are things that escape my powers of observation. As I cannot conceive of a vacuum, nothingness, I affirm the reality of eternal substance.

BILDAD

Is this infinite substance inactive ?

ZOPHAR

I will not undertake to solve the mysterious problem of primitive matter and intra-atomic energy. Wiser men than myself have foundered in this bog ; and those who triumph, only come off with honour by assuming pontifical airs. I do not believe in matter that is inactive. This is no dogma, however—it is an opinion ; and the reason why I, who know very little about science, make bold to offer it, is that the greatest of scientists appear to accept it unanimously. The name of *matter-force* might be given to it. Gustave Lebon maintains that the most imperceptible of inanimate objects is made up of innumerable small worlds, in each of which myriads of tiny elements revolve with

the utmost rapidity. This theory may be disputed, but, for myself, I see nothing impossible in it.

It is this energy, inherent in atoms or monads, that serves as a basis on which certain philosophers assert that the world is built. They regard it as affording a satisfactory explanation of rotation, attraction, the condensation of primitive substance, more or less compact nebulæ, the birth of primitive organisms, and finally the appearance of animals and men. In proof thereof, they make experiments before our wondering gaze, experiments which they look upon as conclusive. These are extremely fascinating, for surely the reconstruction of lower organisms would be of the utmost importance; laboratory experiments of a nature to enable the senses to grasp the divers phases of life in its origin would certainly be marvellous discoveries. Perhaps men of science will some day succeed in their efforts.

But their success will prove nothing. These experiments would be really convincing only if they could be carried on in a world which nothing united to God, that living One whose reality alone is the source and origin of life. So long as they are conducted in a universe which is subject to his incessant, eternal action, they will of necessity be subordinate thereto. As it is impossible for a man to leap beyond his shadow, so it is impossible for scientists to isolate themselves from God. And even were there to come forth from their crucibles an animated organism,

endowed with sensibility and life, they would not thereby have proved that God had no part in the experiment.

Matter-force remains matter-force ; a blind energy remains a blind energy ; an unintelligent movement remains an unintelligent movement. And all the combined energies of the innumerable army of atoms or monads would never succeed in creating anything but chaos, were there not in the world a directing and controlling eternal Thought. The crystals and cells that scientists find, instead of refuting this Thought, are an indisputable proof of it.

None the less is it true that the Biblical account of the creation of the world—in spite of the explanations that have been advanced—is a myth. A genius like Darwin does not appear amongst men without overthrowing accepted ideas and pious certainties. The theory of evolution will be the catechism of the near future.

But the more obscure, incomprehensible and untenable this evolution is in its hypothesis of matter which is simply endowed with energy, the more clear, comprehensible and rationally tenable it seems when throughout the unknowable primitive element there thrills somewhat of the divine spirit, the supreme intelligence, the eternal will, and the universal soul of God. Blind energy cannot explain the manifestation of feeling or consciousness, intelligence or genius. There must be some other source, and, to my mind,

that source is God. For God is life ; and life produces life. Whether by immanency or contact, by radiation or fulguration, life ever produces life ! And whilst God, the infinite and eternal, fills the entire universe with his presence, I see no difficulty in admitting that at some point or other in space, on a planet now extinct, in the course of trillions of centuries, substance, over which the Spirit has brooded, may have given birth to the living cell, and afterwards to inferior, shapeless, monstrous and apocalyptic organisms.

I can readily imagine that there may have been formed, as the result of this age-long effort, less and less disproportionate beings, adapting themselves to their environment, or, according to the recent theory of Quinton,¹ adapting their environment to their own existence, and resulting finally, after an incalculable series of millenarian transformations, in the family of that pithecanthropus—half man, half ape—which has been set up as our ancestor.

God, of a certainty, has a part in the birth of mankind. There can be nothing alien to him, for nothing happens outside of his eternal laws ; but God did not by a definite act of will, an uttered word, or a secret design unexpectedly arising in his unchanging mind, create the universe. In the eternal universe peopled by his Spirit, in a corner of space that combined favourable conditions of temperature and environment,

¹ Quinton, *L'eau de mer : milieu organique*.

substance assumed life. First, cells were formed ; then living organisms ; and century after century —always by virtue of the eternal contact between substance and God—these organisms finally acquired perfect organs and created for themselves a moral personality.

BILDAD

But is not that a creation too ? Leibnitz, who professed to believe in creation, also said : “ Monads emanate from God by a process of continual fulguration.”

ZOPHAR

An uncreated substance has no need of a creator. But though it was not by an act of creative will that the world issued from a state of nothingness, I regard it as certain that substance assumed life at the very heart of life itself. “ In God (not by him) we move and have our being.” This quickened substance, during centuries of investigation, passed through painful contraction and pleasant expansion ; it received sometimes harmonious, sometimes discordant vibrations. These contractions, expansions, and vibrations became, according to the scale of being, either sensation or feeling. We experience an infinite number of feelings and sensations, ranging from poignant grief to divine ecstasy, from tragic sobbing to Homeric laughter. All this constitutes an invisible ladder, the lower rungs of which descend into an abyss of darkness and suffering, whereas the higher ones

stretch into boundless light and happiness. A simple contact may cause us to experience the whole gamut of sensations : an unexpected telegram may throw us into consternation and despair or into a state of the most abandoned joy. Sensations, whether sorrowful or mirth-provoking, are all alike in their nature.

To ask why there are painful sensations, is to ask why there are pleasant ones.

There is no such thing as the problem of evil. There is only one problem, and that is the problem of sensation !

JOB

Granted. Why then does sensation exist ?

ZOPHAR

Did I believe in the traditional God of creation, there would be an object in asking this question, for God would have willed sensation. Did I believe in a revelation which afforded a key to the palace of mysteries, then, too, I could answer. Eliphaz may be able to do so ; for my part, I simply acknowledge that it exists.

The explanation I offer of its existence possesses only a relative value, as also does the whole of my theory, for human explanations are no more than the various aspects under which our knowledge enables us to consider reality. Reality passes through the texture or fabric of our words, like water through the meshes of a net. Sensation ? Laboriously has

it been acquired by primitive organisms. Will it ever be known at the cost of what fruitless attempts, what obscure investigations, what heroic efforts, what slaughter and sacrifice, sensation was purchased by the mysterious soul of these organisms? No. But the day on which the first conscious sensation took place was a day of triumph; that day humanity came to birth. Substance-force, drawing upon eternal springs, had reached the condition needed for its existence. This was the first step towards life.

It is this sensation, developed and enriched, a delicate instrument, and a skilful monitor, that we have inherited from our distant ancestors. I regard it as the most indispensable of all human necessities. For instance, did not sensation inform us, by an unpleasant sense of contraction, that the stomach was empty, we should allow ourselves to die of hunger or thirst. Did not a sensation of unconscious discomfort compel us to breathe, we should not live ten minutes! Sensation is the ever-watchful guardian of life itself.

Add to this that it is at the root of all progress, and then ask me again why sensation exists.

Feeling also is a creator of pain or of joy. In the loftier sphere of the moral life it performs the same function as sensation in the physical domain. It rejects that which offends or wounds it, and seeks after those things that are in conformity with its own nature. Being more specifically spiritual in its origin, feeling vibrates and thrills like an æolian harp at the faintest

breath of spirit. When confronted with the true, the beautiful, and the good, it constitutes a stream of harmonious emotions, of virile enthusiasm and heroic aspiration. Confronted with the ugly, the false, and the evil, it becomes abhorrence or revolt, grief or indignation, anguish or despair! A mysterious intuition, a quasi-supernatural divination, sheds light on its path, and all our active powers, all our spiritual energies, spring forth along with it to meet the future.

It is the coalition and union of the divine powers within ourselves against the powers of darkness, against the dead weight of blind matter.

JOB

Dualism once more.

ZOPHAR

Art thou sure of this, Job? Is it a dualism whose twin elements are perhaps nothing but the dual aspect or nature of unknowable unity? Is it a co-eternal dualism, a dualism in nature and a dualism in man? Who knows but that man, the offshoot of eternal substance and eternally living spirit, is not some day destined to realise, throughout the limitless series of his successive existences, that unity which does not yet exist? Who can say what mysterious end is being pursued by that divine element which quickens us into being? Is its object to rescue from a state of unconsciousness a blind and deaf substance and instil life into it? Who knows?

What I do know is, that I have not set up unity as a fetish. We are in presence of two principles : *the principle of primordial variability and the principle of constancy*.¹ Thou mayest regard them as one in the beginning, and affirm that the heterogeneous springs from the homogeneous . . . if thou wilt. For my part, I maintain that biological existence "is *per se* a fact of opposition and contradiction"; I am convinced that "life is preserved only by developing adverse forces against the cosmos."² Thus I am of necessity forced to culminate in a sort of dualism : not the metaphysical dualism advocated by Bildad, but rather an experimental one which I am compelled to set up. Is this dualism real? I do not know. Indeed, we know so little of this matter-force, as a sensible element of evolution, that my agnosticism will not surprise thee.

What I do know is, that the struggle is a terrible one, and that the forces of darkness are still victorious. This is what causes Bildad to say that God is powerless.

No, in his immutable will God continues to will what he ever willed ; in his character as an indefatigable sower he places within the reach of all the glorious illumination, the invincible valour and indestructible certainty, that emanate from him.

Early there came to man a dim consciousness of

¹ *Mercur de France*, Nov. 1907, p. 35.

² Jules de Gaultier, *La vertu de l'illogique*, p. 45.

this beneficent, providential presence : early did he discover God. He saw him in that beauty and truth, that purity and harmony, that divinity and life, which attract him irresistibly, fill him with exaltation and enthusiasm, and spur him on to heroic deeds, to acts of renunciation and self-sacrifice ! Then, no sooner do his wondering eyes light upon those sparks of divinity, the radiant stars that shine through the dark sky, than all sense of peace departs from him. The fever of the beautiful, the true, and the good consumes him ; and in his ardour he carries the world along with him ! Enthusiasts, prophets, mighty initiators have been “ possessed by the Spirit ” ; they have traced deep furrows throughout the ages, and it is in their track that the masses follow.

This is “ hitching one’s waggon to a star ” ; the ardent search after loftier truths, serener beauties, diviner harmonies ; the breathless ascent towards God !

The attraction exercised over the world by the ruling presence is, in religious language—I repeat and maintain,—the call or summons of God. The untiring pursuit of the human ideal along the paths of the earth—whether it is known to be the ideal or not—constitutes obedience to his will. The ardent longing for justice, brotherhood, and peace, the desire with which the masses are filled to realise the future city—whether aware of it or not,—is the slow realisation of the kingdom of God.

Such, then, is my vision of the universe : a perfect, omnipotent God, living from all eternity in his unfathomable mystery, the source of order, life, intelligence, beauty, and divinity ; increate matter, whose tiniest molecules are permeated with blind energy, the source of motion and conflict, of absurdity, disorder, and chaos ; an eternal contact between these blind forces and the living One whose absolute perfection safely shelters itself behind his omnipotence. And from this eternal contact of insensate matter with all-wise Being, fatally and of necessity there are born imperceptible organisms, demons formed of clay and spirit, with all the base cravings of blind forces and all the lofty aspirations after divinity.

As darkness and light, they perpetuate the characteristics they receive from their dual origin. As body of earth and soul divine, they bear death and life in their fragile, harassed being ! Their substance tends to fall back into its original state of unconsciousness. From the very fact of his being, God invincibly attracts their spirit. The force of positive attraction will gradually prevail over the dead weight. When they become aware of their divinity, demons tend to become angels.

Nothing in all this is the result of a definite determination, a special intervention of God ; everything, of necessity, is brought to pass within the limits of his eternal will. Similarly, it is not at this moment in accordance with the express command of

God that I am speaking to you and you are listening to me ; the words I utter strike your ear by virtue of his immutable will. A will that does not vary, but continues from age to age, is not a will at all : *it is a law*. The will of God appears to us only under the aspect of irrevocable laws.

And it is within these perfect limits that our moral being, our real self, a veritable accumulator of living energy, is developed, by contact with God. It decides intelligently, boldly, and voluntarily for such or such an alternative ; and as its decision is arrived at in conformity with immutable laws, it is realised only on the condition that it continues to conform to these laws.

ELIPHAZ

Blind fatalism !

ZOPHAR

Conscious determinism, or rather relative freedom.

These laws, which in their impassive unchangeableness seem to weigh heavily on the world, are the sole guarantee of what we call our moral freedom. Besides this, they are the guarantee of order and harmony, the only condition of scientific research, the indispensable basis of all progress, the immovable rock on which the human will can erect the structure of its dreams. By them, mankind will free itself from bondage to the blind forces of matter ; by them, science will succeed in preventing the cosmic conflicts,

catastrophes, earthquakes, and cataclysms which are perpetuated by these blind forces and are destined to be overcome by the disciplined forces of spirit. . . .

JOB

Easy will be thy triumph in the future, Zophar ; but the present is more grievous to bear. Whether evil be caused by divine necessity or by a special decree of the will of God, none the less is it a grievous reality.

ZOPHAR

Yes ; but it is not in divine necessity that we must look for its causes.

Far from being a burden upon the world, it is the finest possible instrument for its liberation. Laws, indeed, are nothing else than instruments of providence, placed at our disposal by an eternal Wisdom. From them we may obtain good or evil, joy or sorrow, poverty or prosperity. All we have to do is to will, to will on the divine plane of expansive, rich, harmonious life ! Unfortunately, the lower instincts are still predominant ; the powers of darkness weigh heavily on our poor human wills and transform the world into a battle-field in which selfishness and base appetities, pride and covetousness "furiously rage together." The only effect of social groupings has been to widen the field on which the "struggle for life" takes place, and make this struggle keener and

more terrible than ever. In bygone ages, one man, with flint weapons, was to all intents and purposes the equal of another ; at the present time we are living in a state of organised servitude. Present-day civilisation, with its gorgeous outer show, its religious hypocrisy and refinement of vice, has still only reached the groping stage, a period of trial. We have come to the stone age of the social organism. If the slow, age-long formation of animated organisms were to be called a creation, then it would be fitting to say, in spite of the forty centuries of relative civilisation behind us, that the creation of social organisms is only at the cave stage of the paleolithic period, so to speak. Primitive organisms, resulting, at the cost of endless and painful research, in our wonderful sense-organs, mark the first advance along the path trodden by conscious humanity. But men have not yet brought the social organism into existence. They are still groping their way ; and we find hesitation, repetitions of past experiments, and errors in management, all of which produce frightful competition, insolent greed, criminal encroachment, shameless exploitation, misery and tyranny, corruption and rottenness everywhere. The individual evil has been added to the social evil ; and though, materially speaking, present-day man is exposed to fewer privations than was the man of prehistoric times, his sufferings are infinitely, incomparably greater.

As thou seest, Job, I do not deny the existence

of evil. Still, while even nowadays there are people who die of hunger and cold, wretches moaning in filthy garrets, poor children weeping, and girls with no other prospect before them than a life of sin, helpless creatures for whom no one cares, desperate ones whom no one comforts, criminals whom no one tries to redeem by love and confidence, and there is the utmost distress and suffering throughout the world, do not accuse God of it all! Accuse none but those who are responsible for it: men! Yes, men who, encased in the armour of egoism, in the peace and quiet of their own seclusion, watch the famished crowds pass along! God? He is the only one who cares for those who suffer. He, whose eternal perfection seems as though it must isolate him from unconscious humanity, sustains men by his continual presence, enlightens them by his spirit, opens before them glorious and wonderful horizons, comforts them, and fills their soul with newness of life. Wholly encircled and inspired by this adorable presence, they talk, with ardent longing, of divine goodness, of paternal watchfulness, and the guardianship of providence, whilst their trembling lips murmur that sublime word, the word which sums up all love and affection: "Father."

JOB

Yes; but this is a dream. God does not hasten to answer their prayer.

ZOPHAR

God does not hasten to answer those who pray, because there is no need to do so : he is there all the time ! Prayer opens their souls to his fatherly influence, and God speaks to them, fills them with life, gently restores and strengthens them with his own might.

JOB

He gives them courage when they are cast down, but he does not heal the sick, rescue the dying and despairing, help the unfortunate wretches imprisoned in a fallen-in mine, or save shipwrecked passengers as they cry out in terror and distress !

I know that traditional religion, with its dogmas, is somewhat childish, unconsciously regarding God as responsible for evil ; but by claiming that he is able to intervene triumphantly in the ordinary course of events, it gives the unhappy creatures some hope of efficacious help, at all events. Sheer delusion, sayest thou ? It may be so, but it is a beneficent, a consoling delusion. Thy God, on the other hand, discourages hope !

ZOPHAR

No, Job, my God kindles in the heart of all a hope that nothing can extinguish—the hope of life at any rate. In presence of the raging elements, on the threshold of death, God is there ; and whilst yawning waves rage around the endangered ship, threatening to engulf

a perishable body, the soul, aware of its own divinity and upheld by the spirit, knows that the deepest abysses could not imprison it. Of divine origin, it lives in God. No longer is death the horrible crisis in which everything culminates : it is one of the innumerable links in the never-ending chain of evolution ; a necessary transformation within the heart of indestructible life. Remember the words of Christ, when dying : "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit !"

What will become of this spirit after separation from the physical organism ? Does it retain its personality ? Or does it simply return to its divine source ? I know not. Does it pursue its undefined track, with all its experience gained in an unconscious state, under new forms, and undergoing processes of purification unknown to us ? Are there a whole series of lives before it, enabling it to free itself altogether from the mortal impress of matter ? This is what I believe. Still, these are metaphysical hypotheses ; and though each man may have the right to form his own conjectures as regards infinity and futurity, fully conscious human beings have no right to take pleasure in these day-dreams.

We are living on this earth under strictly determined conditions, and it is here that our task lies : here, most certainly, that we have to live first.

Here, too, an imperious obligation forces itself upon my mind : that I must love truth above all things ! If truth is to destroy my most cherished beliefs, let it destroy them ! I wish to be able to say, though ruin

and desolation compass me about, what thy forefather said of God : "Blessed be truth !" And though truth were to dash all my hopes to the ground, I should not cease to serve and love it, to proclaim it abroad. Beneficent trickery I will not have.

Thus do I regard myself as the disciple of him who came "to bear witness to the truth."

But though the Master's profound intuition had revealed to him the mysteries of life in God, his mind, only partially freed from the dogmas of his people, had retained certain doctrines which my experience and my reason alike refuse to accept. For instance, I cannot believe in a miraculous intervention in the ordinary course of things.

Thou bringest this against me as a reproach, Job ; but hast thou the right to do so ? Just think ! During thy successive misfortunes, didst thou not pray for God to intervene ? With tears and sobs, didst thou not raise suppliant hands to him ? And yet, did the miracle take place ? No need to listen to thy answer ; I know it beforehand ! The sight of thee in thy present isolation and distress is sufficient. God did not intervene, nor does he intervene at any time.

He is not the *deus ex machina* of the play or the novel, always arriving just at the right moment to unite the lovers, to cause virtue to triumph and vice to be confounded.

Now, that is what believers would like him to be. That is what unbelievers reproach him for not being !

I am not ignorant of all the greatness there may be in this belief, nor do I forget that the Master, whose name I bear, was not wholly exempt from it. In the garden of Gethsemane a momentary sense of faintness came over him. Secretly informed of the treachery of one of his disciples, knowing from that time forth the character of the traitor who had mysteriously left the room where the Passover had been celebrated, Jesus saw that the moment of sacrifice and renunciation had come. Tears filled his eyes: the thought that one of his disciples was on the point of betraying him was hateful to him: "O my Father, if it be possible," he exclaimed, "let this cup pass from me!"¹

His mind, steeped in Jewish literature, called to his aid the powerful God of Moses, the God to whom everything is possible, the God of the prophets, who rewards the good and punishes the wicked. In his distress he stammered: "All things are possible unto thee!"² And from the depths of his heart there arose once more the ardent cry of supplication: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me!"

I am well aware that certain exegetes inform us that this passage is not authentic. I maintain that it must have been forced upon the evangelists for them to have inserted it in their accounts of the crucifixion, so opposed is it to their theory of the supernatural divinity of Christ! There, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus shows himself truly human. In him

¹ Matt. xxvi. 39.

² Mark xiv. 36.

I recognise my brother in grief and sorrow, and my love for him increases with the despair that fills his heart.

But God did not intervene ! God did not prevent the betrayal from taking place. He did not bring confusion on the unjust accusers. He did not silence the judges, any more than he stayed the hand that nailed Jesus to the cross !

And there as he hung between heaven and earth, his dying lips, echoing the grievous plaint of the aged and disillusioned prophet, gave utterance to the grave reproach, gentle as the moan of a child and touching as the death of hope itself : "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?" ¹

True, the next moment he had recovered perfect self-possession, and in the midst of his pain and torture was proclaiming the divine presence.

Still, though it be claimed that events did not happen in conformity with the desire of Jesus, is this any reason for saying that they were willed by God ?

No ; all events are produced by precise, definite causes ; and though some of these causes at times escape our notice, they none the less exist. The law of cause and effect is of a nature that leaves no room for miraculous intervention. One might as well ask God to destroy the harmony of his being ; which would mean beseeching him to be God no longer.

¹ Matt. xxvii. 46.

BILDAD

Like thyself, Zophar, I believe in the metaphysical omnipotence of God ; but in acknowledging that events do not permit of a miraculous intervention, thou art recognising that there is one domain closed against him, and that, to all intents and purposes, he is powerless.

ZOPHAR

No, Bildad ; it is man who is powerless, not God. God is omnipotent in his being : his will, instead of complying with the follies of blind matter, forces this latter to yield to his own immutable laws ; no crystallisation ever takes place, no organism is ever formed, without being subject to his controlling thought. Speak not of the powerlessness of God ; the two words are incompatible with each other. It is man who is powerless ; man, who, having created for himself or undertaken a formidable task, cannot fully grasp it or assume responsibility for it. Do not say : God *is* not yet here below, he is in a state of becoming. No ; God is : it is man who is not yet, man who is in a state of becoming. Do not say : God's will has met with defeat. No ; God's will is ever eternally triumphant ; it is the will of man that has miserably failed hitherto. Do not say : God is grieved at his own powerlessness. No ; God is God, and there is nothing that can disturb his stainless serenity. It is man who attributes to God his own feelings, his own sense of powerlessness.

No, indeed ; man fortunately is far from being almighty. May not this be one of the aspects of sovereign will ? Did not God ordain, from all eternity, that omnipotence could only be attainable by a being who had arrived at a state of holiness and truth, of absolute perfection ? Were we omnipotent, we should have a repetition of the destructive war between the Titans and the Olympian Gods ! Judging by the feelings that influence men, the pride and hatred that separate them from one another, their selfishness, evil passions, and base instincts, would not the whole world be given up to fire and sword ? Is it not by a providential arrangement of God that base-minded, jealous beings like ourselves are condemned to impotence ?

Dazzled by the conquests of science, possessed of awe-inspiring explosives, we imagine we can increase our power by violence. This was the error of the cave-dwellers : we are traversing over again, from the social standpoint, the experiences of primitive man in his individual capacity. We imagine our power to be increasing because we can store away in a percussion cap sufficient energy to destroy a town. That, however, is destructive power. True power is creative, and only love can create. This is what God-inspired men have told us throughout the centuries ; it is from them that we must learn if we would acquire the power to overcome evil.

Vainly do we chafe at evil : we shall overcome it

only in proportion as we cease merely to vegetate and to hate one another, and, instead, seek after life and mutual loving-kindness.

To have existence is not to live. Existence results from the blind energy of matter, brooded over by spirit: life comes direct from God. Man will truly live only when his existence becomes life in God, manifested in humanity. Then, the destructive powers that men discover will become powers creative of beauty and harmony, truth and divinity. Man is still powerless, but he is on the way that leads to omnipotence! In him there is a god seeking himself, a god who is gradually realising his own divinity. It is this human god who is to transform the world.

It is not God's function to overcome evil in the world and bring about the reign of justice; this is the part of those living beings who, in the domain of matter-force, have become the temple of the Spirit. It is not God who disposes of earthly riches: it is man! It is not God who regulates the dealings of men with each other, presides over our law-courts, or governs our respective countries; it is man. It is not God who has built up social distinctions, bringing prosperity into one home and poverty and misery into another: it is human selfishness. It is not for God to abolish the springs of suffering and poverty, of vice and corruption: it is for us to do all this!

ELIPHAZ

Is it also ours to curb the raging elements? Can we control floods, volcanic eruptions, or earthquakes?

ZOPHAR

No, Eliphaz; but we can lessen their devastating effects. Who constructed our dikes? Was it God? . . . And if a breach is made in them, who repairs it? God? Of a certainty, whenever men take up some common task, it is God who inspires them if they are acting in the spirit of brotherhood; but they themselves execute the work. Instead of waiting for some impossible intervention from heaven, let us investigate and act for ourselves. Science must find out some means of preventing all the disorderly effects of blind forces; our own ingenuity and activity must protect us therefrom. Make no mistake: evolution consists essentially in transforming our environment, and making it not only more habitable but also better suited to our real needs and more favourable for our physical, intellectual, and moral development.

JOB

Why is man so made that he must go through all this suffering in order to attain to the paltry results we see?

ZOPHAR

Man is not *so made*, Job. Man is not *made* at all: he makes and creates himself every day, he is in a

state of becoming . . . and at the cost of what countless efforts! Now, effort implies suffering. The slightest effort is invariably the result of an inner struggle; it always corresponds to the disappearance or loss of some cherished idea or desire: every step towards life is a tiny death. By facing these partial deaths, piling them up along the path, we advance towards the luminous mountain-tops. And what happens within the restricted field of our own existence is manifested more radically in that immense field called mankind. Mankind is a living body, bound down to the same demands, the same struggles, the same triumphs. It progresses only at the cost of steadfast toil, innumerable and repeated sacrifices. Here too, the paths are strewn with the dead. Gradually, however, the darkness passes away, the horizon is seen, the masses become conscious of their obligations, men tend to create that social body, all of whose members will suffer when one suffers: the day is coming, Job, when under the inspiration of one united effort they will storm the mysterious redoubt of natural forces and firmly control their wild energy.

JOB

Thou art labouring under a delusion as regards the power of men.

ZOPHAR

No, Job. This omnipotence which is at the disposal of God, in the unceasing continuance of his

will, we can acquire for ourselves, for God is on our side. He has placed everything within our reach—his illumination and his spirit, his divine energies and his omnipotence. The sole condition he imposes is that we exercise our will indefatigably in accordance with his eternal plan. His support will never fail us.

He has always been on the side of all whose wills were inclined in the direction of life. He is with all who valiantly engage in some noble work. We are God's workers.

And, if it is true that he has foreseen everything from all eternity, who will say that this is not part of his mysterious plan? I am almost prepared to affirm it to be the case, so strongly do I feel his presence within my soul. Did I dare to interpret his will, I should say that he willed his dominion over substance to be established by mankind. By us, as guardians of his spirit, his kingdom must be built up. Deep in the heart of blind matter, are we not his agents? is it not we who have to realise his providence in that portion of the globe where we have been born?

Yes, Eliphaz, his providence! In the anguish of Gethsemane, Jesus exclaimed: "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" If it be possible! It was not possible for God to intervene, and this prayer met with nothing but silence for a reply, as though God had not heard it! Well! the prayer of Jesus could have been answered, though it did not devolve on God to answer it but rather on mankind!

If it be possible? Yes. It is possible that treachery and foul dealing should be abolished, if men, instead of being wolves to one another, would become brothers and fellow-workers, indulgent towards and respectful of sincere conviction wherever found. It is possible that there may never again be a biassed Sanhedrin, if men, uprooting in themselves every kind of prejudice and destroying that narrow, pharisaical spirit which is so prevalent, seek after justice above all things, and set even above justice a spirit of brotherly compassion. It is possible that there may never again be an indolent, sceptical, and cowardly Pilate, if men once become conscious of their responsibilities! It is possible that there may never again be crucifixions and irreparable chastisements, if men will only abolish these traces of bygone centuries! Death alone—the destined disaggregation of the elements of the body—is inevitable; but, as was the case with thy ancestor, it might be possible for men to die “old and full of days. . . .”

Possible, indeed? Yes, Job, thy riches might have been saved, partially at all events, had not thy friends, plunging headlong into foolish speculations, compromised thy credit and ruined thy well-planned enterprises. Thy children? Even they might not have been taken from thee, had not the unhealthy conditions under which we live, as the result of man’s improvidence, been a favourable soil for the spreading of epidemics; had we not been so foolish as to per-

petuate the barbarous practice of war, and, instead of manufacturing costly engines of destruction, had manufactured guns for carrying cables and safety apparatus capable of effective service on distant breakers. All this would be possible, if the genius of man, instead of being expended on works of destruction, were wholly devoted to live-preserving purposes.

And time will bring this to pass ! Men will become conscious of their high mission. They will finally overcome poverty and famine : the earth is rich enough to feed all its inhabitants. Barracks and artillery-grounds will cease to be built, and granaries, filled with corn, will take their place. Mankind will gradually learn foresight and the spirit of solidarity, justice and love—a living, active love, without which true beauty and happiness cannot exist.

The time will come when men will abolish suffering, physical suffering. They will either discover powerful anæsthetics to overcome it, or they will attack it at its root. They will call forth from the fertile ground those “rivers of milk and honey” mentioned by the prophets—rivers that shall provide life and sustenance for future generations.

Nor is this a dream : it will be the reality of the immediate future, if only men will it ! Let them arm for the fight, engage in battle with the enemy’s forces manfully and valiantly, risking everything in the struggle. It is in this spirit that the redoubts are carried. God favours the bold, and *he wills* that we

win the victory at the edge of the sword of our own will.

ELIPHAZ

Mere day-dreams and fancies of an enthusiast ! The net result of all this means the demolishing of the age-long edifices of tradition, without the erection of a new religion in its stead.

ZOPHAR

I am demolishing nothing, Eliphaz. One does not demolish a thing that is crumbling away.

I do not claim that I am building up a new religion. My religion is one of the many phases of the eternal religion ; the religious sense evolves like everything else : the tendency of Christianity is to become the religion of individual and social effort with a view to the triumph of life. In former times it was believed that the will of God must be modified in order to ameliorate the lot of mankind ; nowadays it is beginning to be understood that it is the will of man that must be modified.

I am simply stating my belief, nothing more.

ELIPHAZ

Thy belief is of little moment. Thou wilt satisfy neither men of science, who will have nothing to do with thy expurgated God, nor believers in tradition, for in thy belief they will not recognise their God. . . .

ZOPHAR

. . . Nor even believers who have freed themselves from dogmatism, Eliphaz, for they will think I am compromising. But I am obeying my own conscience, and its approval is sufficient for me.

ELIPHAZ

And what wilt thou say to those unhappy beings who need immediate consolation? Wilt thou speak to them of future victory? Meanwhile, they are in pain and suffering; that is what troubles them.

ZOPHAR

I shall tell them, with greater truth than thou canst, Eliphaz, that God does not will the existence of their suffering their sickness and distress; but that he does will that, throughout their suffering their sickness and distress, they should ever remain the children of his own spirit, and prove themselves worthy of their spiritual origin and destiny.

I shall raise their courage, strengthen them, and lavish my affection on them. I shall make them conscious of God's presence by evoking within their hearts that peace and serenity which communion with the Father gives. I shall tell them that if everything crumbles away and disappears all around, there is One who stays behind, watching, living, and loving. By will and thought I shall set up a conscious contact

between their faltering energy and the source of all energy. As thou knowest, Eliphaz, once this contact is established I have nothing more to say : it is for God alone to speak to them, and he will do it.

And if, perchance, they would not listen to his voice, I should take them to the Man of Sorrows whose blood was shed on Calvary, and tell them that once, before entering the town in which his destiny was to be fulfilled, he passed an hour of deepest anguish, such as would be experienced by one who should see his own tomb yawning before him and implacable enemies ready to hurl him therein. When in trouble and distress, I should call upon Jesus, remembering his words: "What shall I say? . . . Father, save me from this hour."¹ I should go through all the reasons that would have justified such a request, on the part of one so fundamentally disinterested as Jesus, and should show them this man, triumphing over his natural inclinations, as he exclaims with ardent and enthusiastic faith: ". . . But for this cause came I unto this hour."¹

Mere words would perhaps be unnecessary in presence of such a spectacle. But if not, I should tell them that they must suffer, not as creatures manufactured by any kind of a potter, but as human beings aware of their greatness, as gods advancing towards the one God. I should advocate Christian stoicism! . . .

¹ John xii. 27.

ELIPHAZ

And by so doing thou wouldst strengthen their proud nature even more.

ZOPHAR

No ; rather should I strengthen the sense of their own dignity. This spirit of passive resignation is killing us. Priests, reverend pastors and mandarins like to see men on their knees, in suppliant posture, stammering their feeble prayers. My God likes to see them valiant, strenuously progressing, free alike from boasting and from meanness of every kind, with head erect and soul in harmony with body ! It is his will that we should be men, not a flock of bleating sheep.

All the worse for those professing Christians by whom this truth has not yet been understood ; they shall be scattered, like wisps of straw, to the four winds of heaven.

Friends, let us now bring this conversation to a close. We might continue indefinitely these random prophecies, without ever arriving at an understanding.

JOB

Come and see me again to-morrow, Zophar.

.

As Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar rose to their feet, the tall figure of Elihu, Job's old servant, appeared on the threshold.

"Master," he said, "you have ever associated me

with your life and work ; and as I know the value of your affection, so also do you know how deep are my respect for and my love of you ! Allow me to give utterance to a few words. With intense and passionate interest have I listened to your conversation ; though, maybe, I have not understood everything. As your friends spoke, one after the other, I was continually discovering in my own thoughts an echo of their words. I know not, I cannot tell, who is right, for my simple mind approved of all they said. Still, I felt that all three love God with all their heart, seek after him with all their soul, and desire to serve him with all their strength. And this, to my mind, is the whole of religion.

“Nevertheless, it seemed to me all the time that there are great differences between them, and that they are troubled thereby ; whereas these very differences ought to unite them in the one certainty that they still know very little in comparison with all that of which they are ignorant.

“Besides, it is not in the adoption of any particular doctrine that Christianity consists. Fidelity to Christ does not depend on the firmness of a man’s belief. If such were the case, what would become of simple-minded, ignorant men like myself, whom your discussions fill with confusion and perplexity ?

“There is only one thing in the Gospel that I remember. To my mind it sums up the whole of the law and the prophets, the whole of philosophy and

religion. . . . I refer to those immortal words of the Master : ' Beloved, a new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another.'¹

"Forgive me for adding these few words to your grave conversation : it is an invisible force that compels me to speak."

.

The sun, sinking in the west, floods the whole country with its slanting rays : the canal resembles a river of gold. Along its bank Job's three friends make their way in the direction of the mist-enveloped town ; whilst Job himself, seated on his doorstep, gazes upon the setting sun and is amazed at the glorious spectacle. He thinks of the splendour of light and shade in the paintings of Rembrandt which belonged to him in days gone by.

Was God, by opening his eyes to the beauty of his universe, already restoring to him the very treasures of life that blind circumstance had snatched from his grasp ?

¹ John xiii. 34.

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Monsieur Boutroux has added a preface to the book.

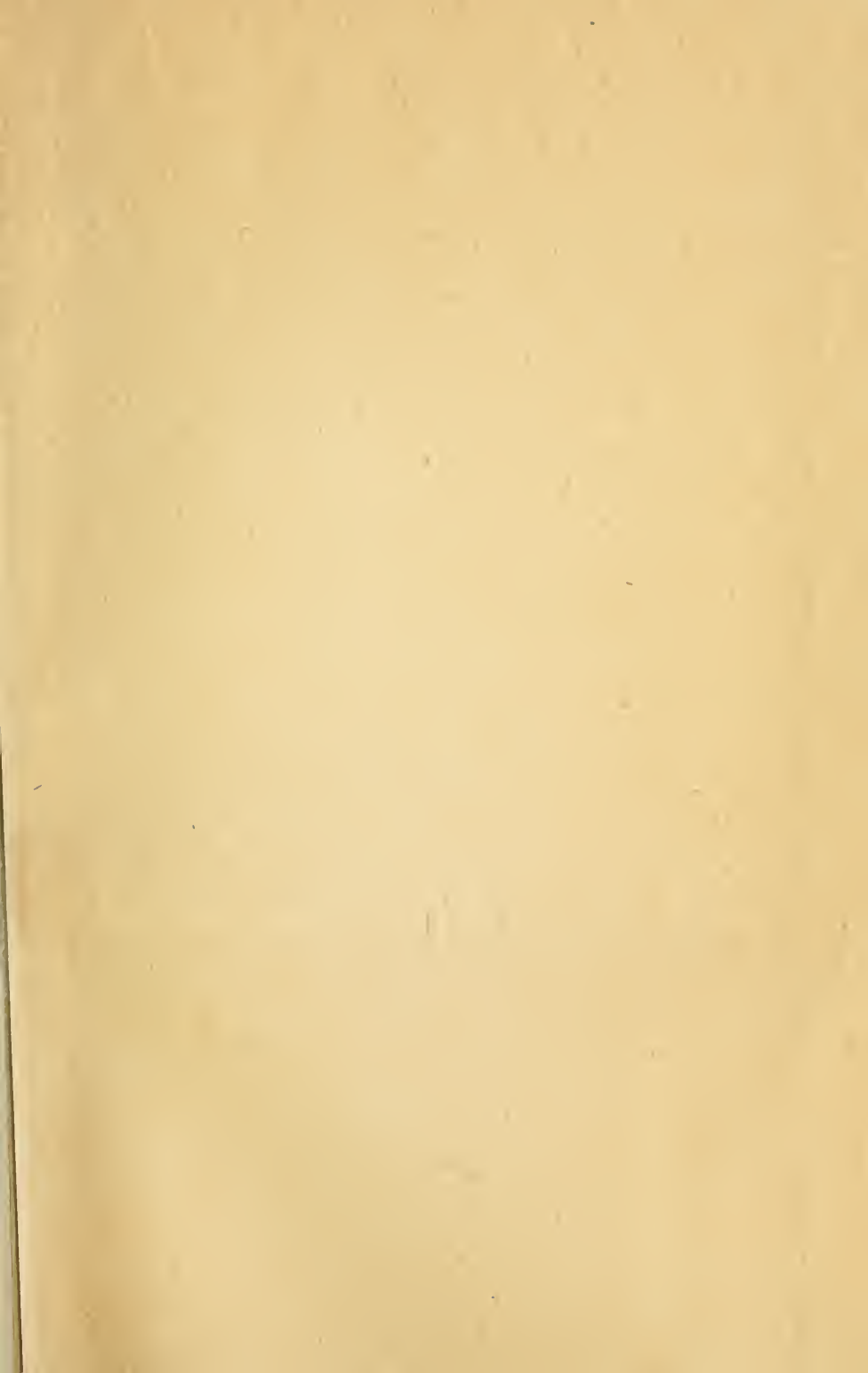
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